
DISAM - A Great Organization

By

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Introduction

I joined the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) in October of 1980. I knew from conversations with many people that it was a first class operation. It did not take long for me to realize why so many had such great respect for the people and the organization. It was obvious from the start that the leadership, faculty, and staff were dedicated to the task at hand. I was truly excited to be a part of it. My purpose in writing this article is to share with you my personal experience but at the same time explain why those who step through the doors of DISAM to become a member of the team never want to leave. Unfortunately the time comes for all to depart whether it is reassignment (for the military), retirement, or, God forbid, death. Believe it or not these are the options in the minds of the DISAM employees. Well, my time has come and my reason for leaving is retirement after thirty-two years of government service, twenty of those years with DISAM.

Hiring Process

I will never forget the day of my interview. I was waiting in the hallway for a short meeting with the deputy commandant prior to my panel interview. I could hear loud noises coming from his office. I could make out only a few of the words being spoken but could clearly understand that someone was in the process of being fired. The secretary for the deputy commandant at this point asked me if I really wanted to work at DISAM. You must realize that in order to come to DISAM, I had to give up my tenure in the competitive civil service and basically start all over again in the excepted civil service. I was not feeling very comfortable at this point but decided to stick it out. I had no idea what his mood would be but felt I was up to the challenge. My fears disappeared immediately upon meeting him and we, to my surprise, had a very pleasant conversation. The next hurdle was the panel interview. The panel, made up of management and faculty, quickly made me feel at ease but at the same time made it clear that special talents were required for employment at DISAM. Well, I obviously passed the test and have enjoyed an incredible twenty years in the Institute. This hiring process allows a manager to select the right person for the job and maintain the caliber of team that exists at DISAM. The secret to success, in my opinion, is having a cadre of highly qualified, motivated, and dedicated professionals on your team. DISAM has managed, over the years, to find these special people, both military and civilians, and I am convinced that this will continue to be the case in the future.

Deputy Commandants/Commandants

Many have passed through the doors of DISAM. The front hallway has a special wall reserved for pictures of these dedicated, but sometimes interesting leaders. The deputy commandant, many of you may not know, was a rotational billet shared by Army, Navy, and Air Force. For whatever reason, the Navy was only able to provide a Navy captain once during my tenure at DISAM. Of the remainder, most were Army officers. In the early days the commandant of the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) was dual hatted as the commandant of DISAM and the DISAM

deputy commandant position was rotated among the services. Due to his substantial AFIT responsibilities, the AFIT/DISAM commandant tended to let the DISAM deputy commandant oversee DISAM matters on a daily basis and interface directly with the OSD and DSCA. When the last general officer retired from AFIT that position was reduced to a colonel. Shortly thereafter, DISAM was capitalized by DSCA and became an official member of the organization. Of course, the commandant (new title) still ran the daily business but another improvement took place. The deputy commandant position was converted and filled by a civilian, a smart move that proved to be of extreme value to the organization. The latest in the change of command for DISAM is the civilianization of the commandant position. Unfortunately, I will not be around to compete for this exciting new civilian job.

Faculty

I had the pleasure over the years to participate in hiring many of the members of faculty, both military and civilian. Most of the civilians are still serving on the DISAM team, and many of the military who chose to retire came back to work for the organization. I can assure you that the faculty represents the best talent that can be found. I have heard these words many times in the past: "If you want the job done right and done right the first time, then give it to DISAM." Time and time again the faculty steps up to these difficult tasks and responds superbly. What is the magic that makes this organization so outstanding? I have asked myself this question many times over the years and the answer is always the same. The men and women of the faculty, all dedicated, motivated, and talented professionals, have made this Institute what it is today. They have been and will always be respected by the security assistance community, the students, and management at DISAM. The faculty represents the ultimate team that works together, shares their ideas, truly cares about their colleagues and strives for success in everything that they do. I think that I have been blessed to be a part of this team. How many of you can truly say that you look forward to getting up in the morning and going to work? I can say that without reservations, and I firmly believe that you would get the same answer from every faculty member.

As we all know, the learning process never stops. Unknown to many people outside this organization, are the daily morning sessions in the staff and faculty lounge. The faculty not only demonstrates its expertise in the field of security assistance but provides sound advice in the areas of automotive repair, electrical wiring, plumbing, stock options, and any other topic that might be of interest. In addition, all the new jokes that have hit the street are under review for possible inclusion in the upcoming classroom lesson for the day. Unfortunately, many of you will not have the pleasure of attending such a meeting, but I can assure you that the tradition will continue. I firmly believe that these discussions are of great benefit to all concerned. It is an opportunity for DISAM members to let off steam, express their ideas, and have fun at the same time. Maybe every organization should have an equivalent to the DISAM faculty lounge.

Staff

Many of you may not realize what is going on behind the scenes in a smooth operating educational institution. There is no doubt that the faculty is talented but the support behind them is equally important. Approximately half of the organization is made up of support staff. All you would have to do to understand their value is to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who handles the paperwork needed for every student?
2. Who registers them for the classes?

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3. Who sets up each and every classroom?
 4. Who prepares the graduation certificates?
 5. Who insures that the coffee and donuts are available for the students?
 6. Who works the personnel issues?
 7. Who prepares those beautiful graphics used by the faculty?
 8. Who types all the correspondence for management signature?
 9. Who is that friendly voice on the line when you call?
 10. Who prepares the travel orders?
 11. Who takes care of the mail?
 12. Who types the *Journal*, and the DISAM text, for publication?
 13. Who buys, stocks, and manages the library?
 14. Who keeps DISAM stocked with needed supplies?
 15. Who takes care of our guest speakers?
 16. Who takes care of the budget?
 17. Who opens the facility in the morning and secures it at days end?

These are just a few of the actions taken by an outstanding staff that keeps this Institute running like a well oiled machine. They, like the faculty, are a talented team working toward a common goal: success. At the end of each course students are asked to complete a course evaluation. The support staff gets as many positive comments as the faculty. The real success for DISAM is the combining of the faculty and staff teams into one cohesive working group. The next time you visit the school, take time to notice some of those things that made your stay a little easier and enjoyable.

Conclusion

I leave this outstanding organization feeling good about my career and knowing that I have made some contributions to its success. There is no doubt that I will miss the people but the time has come for me to move on. New directors for international studies and administration have already been selected. However, the selection of a person to fill the shoes of the commandant and deputy commandant will be a difficult and challenging task. Good luck and best wishes to all my friends and colleagues at DISAM. Last but certainly not least, this is my last opportunity to thank all of those in the security assistance community for making my career one that I will remember and cherish for the rest of my life.

About the Author

W. David Carey was affiliated with DISAM from October 1980 to January 2001 as an instructor, assistant professor, functional manager, course manager, associate professor and the Director of International Studies.